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Statement submitted by Foundation for Research on Technology Migration and Integration, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 30 and 31 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

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Statement

Assessing, measuring and demonstrating the overall impact of programs designed to alleviate poverty is becoming an increasingly formidable task.

Development programs aimed at strengthening the respect for human rights, reducing poverty, and improving health, education, standards of living and physical security around the world are an essential part of global progress. Yet it is deeply disappointing to recognize that very little is known about the net impact of most of these programs, mostly when you consider the amount of money development agencies, developing country governments and NGOs have disbursed in the last decades.

Addressing this gap, and systematically building evidence about what works in development, would make it possible to improve the effectiveness of development assistance by bringing vital knowledge into the service of policymaking and program design aimed at stimulating social and economic development in low- and middle-income countries. That is why many governments and organizations are taking initiatives to improve the evidence base in development policy.

Although many initiatives today are effectively generating and expanding impact evaluations, so producing good evidence on certain questions, investment is still insufficient when you consider the demand and the overall quality of evaluation studies.

UN agencies, multilateral development banks, and developing country governments finance evaluations useful for monitoring and operational assessments, but the kinds of studies needed to judge which interventions work under given conditions, what difference they make, and at what cost, are really underbudgeted. Even when commissioned, impact evaluations frequently fail to yield useful information because of the use of not rigorous methods or data.

The scenario is now getting more and more complex due to the rapidly changing global aid architecture. Nearly a third of official development assistance now flows through partnership-based global and regional programs — especially philanthropic initiatives — whose goals are set at the global level, rather than through the country-focused programs of assistance that have been the mainstay of traditional aid donors.

The increasing number of stakeholders involved in development programs asks for new evaluation methodologies. Normal data collection and evaluation tasks related to monitoring inputs, improving operations, and assessing performance, these are activities governments and international agencies may do well; but what they fail in is building knowledge which requires studies that fall outside normal budget and planning cycles and for which incentives are sorely lacking.

The knowledge we are referring to concerns the net impact of a program or intervention on conditions that the program sought to alter. Acquiring this

knowledge typically demands studies that are different from typical program monitoring or process evaluations. It requires impact studies, meaning studies that document whether particular programs are actually responsible for improvements in social outcomes relative to what would have happened without them.

Today, concern about the above-mentioned evaluation gap is widespread, as demonstrated by the many initiatives under way from public agencies, intergovernmental commissions, NGO networks, research centres, and foundations:

- the efficacy of spending is one of the main issue of developing country governments' information gathering;
- NGOs are more and more interested in evaluating the impact of their programs. Since the identification of what works and what does not is considered as vital for both better programs and more effective fundraising, they have started collaborations with leading academic institutions;
- donor countries are increasingly concerned that international financial assistance should generate results.

FORMIT Foundation — through its subsidiary FORMIT Servizi — has been dealing for years now with evaluation and monitoring to ensure quality of ICT projects presented by third parties for Public Administration. However monitoring, supervision of projects and evaluation of results are just means for us to reach the real objective: making it possible for information systems to become the main instrument enhancing the *effectiveness* of operation of public administration in terms of better organisation of work, more *effective* service provided for citizens, extension of the range of provided services.

FORMIT, in fact, uses evaluation as a management tool to meet program goals, to improve program *effectiveness* and to develop innovative methodologies to measure the impact of public investment.

The same approach has to be used in the framework of international cooperation where there is a real need for governments and agencies to reinforce efforts to generate and apply knowledge from impact evaluations of development programs.

This can be done through:

- strengthening overall monitoring and evaluation systems;
- improving resources assigned to impact evaluation;
- stimulating collaboration between the various actors of aid (i.e. policymakers, project managers, and evaluation experts);
- improving standards for evidence;
- facilitating access to knowledge; and

- building capacity in developing countries to conduct rigorous evaluations.

FORMIT strongly believes progress will be slow and investment insufficient without greater effort and this effort cannot be but collective. We are moving ahead to a new era of partnership and a pooled approach involving the participation of multiple stakeholders to reduce the evaluation gap could be more effective than independent actions by individual countries and agencies.

The Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat could coordinate the proposed multi-stakeholder partnerships for clustering studies around common themes and across different contexts, ensuring the reliability/validity of these studies, registering and disseminating studies, and building research capacity in developing countries, including the setting up of an ad-hoc voluntary membership group supported by FORMIT in the role of a catalyst to monitor the management of evaluation activities to improve decision-making at all levels.

This seems to be a really *effective* way to strengthen the achievements made since the last Triennial Comprehensive Policy Review and to build on recent progress on the "Delivering as one" plan at the country level.